THE DISCIPLESHIP/SHEPHERDING MOVEMENT

Posted by Steven Lambert | Mar 4, 2015

The matter of the Discipleship/Shepherding controversy and “movement” is virtually unknown to many believers who have come to the Lord since the controversy erupted in the mid-1970s. Additionally, apparently there are many who came to the Lord prior to the development of the Discipleship movement who, nonetheless, have no awareness or only a vague awareness of its existence. Personally, I do not know how such a highly publicized and public controversy could have possibly escaped any believer’s notice, nevertheless, that is the claim of many.

Despite that unawareness, however, those who are unaware are not by virtue of that unawareness unaffected by the matter. Quite to the contrary, many of those same people who claim to be totally uninformed concerning the controversy attend churches or are part of organizations or networks in which the basic tenets of Discipleship are being espoused and practiced, albeit, in most cases, now covertly. It is these uninformed and unsuspecting victims of deception I most hope to reach with the message of this book.

There are a large number of professing believers who are not of this category of the uninformed, who are quite aware of this controversial matter, who have nevertheless, evidently of their own free will, opted to align themselves with these heretical beliefs and practices by attending churches or being members of groups or organizations who espouse them. These people have apparently made this choice despite the fact that the Discipleship/Shepherding philosophies, doctrines, and practices have been unequivocally repudiated and proven to be utterly false, and their originators have long since been discredited and fallen into disrepute.

My hope is that those who continue to associate themselves with these doctrines and practices will read and seriously weigh the evidence presented in these pages, and that they will, as a result, renounce and repent from these destructive heretical teachings and practices. That is my hope and prayer, as well as my reason for writing *Charismatic Captivation*.

Sadly and unfortunately, however, it has been my experience that many of those who have been heavily indoctrinated by *"doctrines of demons"* such as this, which are inspired by *"deceitful* (*seducing*, KJV) *spirits"* and promulgated *"by means of the hypocrisy of liars,"* tend to become ***"seared over in their conscience as with a branding iron"*** (1 Tim. 4:1,2) by the error. In other words, the false doctrine becomes virtually indelibly imprinted upon the minds of those who have been fully indoctrinated by the devilish error. The deception permeates the entire belief system of those indoctrinated by it. Unless they are willing to yield to supernatural deliverance by the Spirit of God, as the brand seared into the hide of a cow by means of a red-hot branding iron is unremovable, it is virtually impossible to remove this deception from the minds of those who have been infected with it.

There are some who have defected from the Charismatic cults which espouse these doctrines and employ these practices, and been liberated from the throes of the enslavement they engender, fortunately, but there are many more who have not than there are who have. In the case of those who have, their rescue required the supernatural intervention of God—with God all things are possible—to excise the spiritual cancer growing within their soul and to bring recovery. Many of the fully indoctrinated, however, have thus far chosen not to accept the emancipation extended to them by Christ, choosing, for some dark and inexplicable reason, instead to remain forever ensnared in the snare of the trapper. Many of these poor souls, because of the indoctrination they have receive, are literally petrified at the thought of departure from the group of which they are a part and the "covering" of its leaders, for fear that they would forfeit rightstanding with God, incur His wrath and curses upon themselves, and be eternal damned.

Notwithstanding, I write, hoping and believing that some will hear within these pages their Emancipation Proclamation emanating from an All-Powerful, All-forgiving God who in the twinkle of an eye can set the captive free, and who desperately wants to do so. It is He who has declared, "**WHOSOEVER** shall call upon the Name of the Lord, *shall be delivered*!"

In order to have a thorough understanding of this whole matter, fully comprehending the effect and impact these hyper-authoritarian doctrines and practices have had upon individual believers and the collective Body of Christ, it is absolutely essential not only to understand the essence of the Discipleship/Shepherding doctrines and practices

themselves and why they were erroneous, but also to have some historical perspective of the so-called “movement” they spawned. It is for this reason and this reason alone, in the face of this apparent lack of awareness by many people concerning the matter, that I present in this chapter a synoptic history of the Discipleship/Shepherding “movement,” its primary principals and more prominent critics, as well as the effects the movement and its teachings has had upon the Church at-large and the Charismatic/Pentecostal segment in particular. By far, however, the main body of this volume is comprised of chapters devoted to examination of these doctrines and practices themselves and their unscripturality, and to the overriding objective of showing those captivated by them how to be liberated.

[***Important Note:*** *As you read this article, please keep in mind that the scenarios described herein are as they were when the book from which this article is taken was first published in 1996.*]

The Genesis of the Charismatic Movement

Evolving essentially, though unofficially, and to a large extent unintentionally, out of the Pentecostal Movement of the earlier part of this century, the Charismatic Movement had its inception in 1960 with a series of events involving Dennis Bennett, an Episcopalian rector, who along with a significant number of other Episcopalians, received the Baptism in the Holy Spirit. The Movement continued to develop and take shape as a similar but yet distinct and somewhat diverse Movement from its precursor throughout the decade of the 1960s.

In the process of time, various groupings, clusters, and even some “spiritual” cliques, if you will, began to form, comprised of a growing number of believers sharing one thing in common a new experience called, “the Baptism of the Holy Spirit.” These gatherings were primarily a forum for sharing experiences, fellowship, mutual encouragement, and receiving more teaching regarding the Spirit-baptized life and walk. Initially, they were intentionally informal, unstructured, non-directive, and non-authoritarian.

The Charismatic Movement (and this is what made it distinctive from its predecessor, the Pentecostal Movement) at its inception, was not at all sectarian in nature. In general, the clarion call trumpeted forth by the principal proponents and expositors of the Charismatic Movement at the outset was not a call “to come *out* from among them,” but an invitation and exhortation “to come *into* a deeper fullness of the Spirit.” Clearly, the *Divine* intent for the Charismatic Movement was not to further reinforce denominational walls and divisiveness, nor to create new ecclesiastical organizations, but rather just the opposite: to impact multitudes trapped behind denominational walls who longed for more of God’s Power and Essence to be tangibly manifest in their lives.

For the first ten years, in fact, the primary thrust of the Movement stayed within the auspices of Divine purpose. This new Wind of the Spirit billowed across denominational partitions, impacting, to some degree at least, most all of the mainline churches and denominations. Swirling first, as I mentioned, among the Episcopalians, it soon had extended to certain segments of the Lutherans, Methodists, Catholics, Presbyterians, Mennonites, and even among a large portion of the multiplicity of Baptist factions, not only in the U.S. but also in Canada, South and Central America, and abroad. In addition to impacting the mainline denominations, even individual Pentecostal churches soon began to embrace or at least acquiescently tolerate the somewhat more demonstrative Charismatic style of worship and manifestations in the Gifts of the Spirit, as well as the various teachings indigenous to the Charismatic Movement which gradually evolved.

In retrospect, it is awesome how much was accomplished in the course of only ten years, and all basically under the exclusive inspiration and direction of Jesus, the Head of the Church, and His Divine Representative, the Holy Spirit, virtually void of human assistance. Thousands of existing believers were being introduced to a whole new dimension of the “Abundant Life” Christ came to give, injecting new life and fire into many of the dead or dying churches of which they were apart. Moreover, this fresh fire of fervor was even beginning to attract, like a moth to candlelight, fairly significant numbers of new believers as the promise-filled teaching of *“a new and living way”* was proclaimed.

A host of new ministries emerged, some enjoying meteoric ascent into national and international scope and notoriety. Torrents of Charismatic literature gave rise to new publishing companies and new life to many heretofore floundering publishing houses publishing Christian material. Christian radio and television, though used moderately by a small number of preachers previously, really came of age, even spawning whole new networks and exclusively Christian, independent stations. A small number of unaffiliated, autonomous, non-denominational churches began to emerge, mostly out of necessity, in order to “go on with the Lord” after whole segments of newly Spirit-baptized believers and ministers found themselves being given “the left foot of disfellowship” from their former churches.

The Fab Five

Frankly, things were basically sailing along amazingly well for the first decade of the Charismatic Renewal until a group of four (later expanded to five) men emerged from relative obscurity to stake their claim on the burgeoning Charismatic conglomerate. Apparently, they had concluded that the supernatural administration of Jesus and the Holy Spirit over the Church during the denouement of this new Movement, void of human involvement (or, interference) as it was, simply was not enough. What this Movement needed, they theorized, was some good, old-fashioned human organization,

man-centered authoritarianism, and ecclesiastical hierarchy. Moreover, apparently, they were the anointed ones who had been called upon by God to assist Jesus and the Holy Spirit in getting the Charismatic Movement "organized."

The "Fab Five" (aka, "The Fort Lauderdale Five") alliance consisted of **Derek Prince**, **Bob Mumford**, **Charles Simpson**, **Don Basham**, and **Ern Baxter**. A less known sixth associate was **John Poole**. Together these individuals formed the organization that would be "the center of one of the most violent controversies (i.e., the Discipleship/Shepherding controversy) in Protestant charismatic history,"1 **Christian Growth Ministries** (CGM), headquartered in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida.

Initially, the ministries of four of the five (Baxter, being the fifth, who joined the others in 1974) converged prior to the formation of CGM under the umbrella of another organization, **Holy Spirit Teaching Mission** (HTSM), a Charismatic teaching-guild of sorts comprised primarily of denominationally-affiliated Charismatic ministers and lay-leaders. The official organ through which the CGM leaders propagated their teachings was *New Wine* magazine, originally begun under the auspices of HSTM. The relationship among the Fab Five was further cemented when they were asked by the HSTM in 1970 to step up their role in the leadership of the organization when "a moral problem and financial difficulties threatened its future."2 The Fab Five not only accommodated that request, but eventually took the matter a step further, forming their own organization, CGM, over which they installed themselves as leaders, and took over *New Wine* magazine as well.

The objective of CGM purported by the founders "was to bring Spirit-baptized Christians to maturity and to teach church-building,"2 which on the surface seemed to be worthy and proper purposes. And, in 1972 the group curtailed their regular teaching sessions in Fort Lauderdale to begin a campaign to expand their influence and promulgate their private doctrines and practices nationwide by means of regional conferences.

The Fab Five Introduce the Discipleship Doctrines

However, it soon surfaced that their particular brand of theology of "maturity" and "church-building" included unproven, unscriptural, and excessive concepts regarding authority, submission to established authority, shepherding, and discipleship, all of which, in their proper perspective and within the bounds of Biblical propriety and Divine intent, are bona fide and important precepts in true Christianity. Central also to the theology of the CGM principals was a notion that every believer, laymen and ministers alike, must have a "personal pastor." It was this assertion upon which the shepherding relationships were predicated, and which, as alluded to earlier, resulted in a "chain-of-command" (a

nomenclature which they and their protégé's took great pains in avoiding) schematic, of sorts, which the Discipleship/Shepherding teachers claimed to be the Scriptural paradigm for the concept of authority which they espoused.

This vertical, descending, "chain-of-command" was a pyramid-shaped, multi-tiered organizational structure, which had at the top echelon of the pyramid (it just so happened) none other than the Fab Five themselves, who claimed (conveniently) to be in "submission" to each other, which arrangement, they purported, acted as a fail-safe "checks and balance" system to totally preclude them from falling prey to the corruptive properties of absolute power to which, historically, so many others (albeit, less spiritual than they, of course) succumbed.

Descending, then, from the individual members of the "Quintumvirate" were pastors ("shepherds" they were called) of local churches from all over the country who were personally "submitted" to one of these Five as their "personal pastor." Though the "submission" was supposedly "personal," by extension, according to the tenets of the Discipleship/Shepherding teaching, this meant that, ultimately, so also were the submitters' ministries and churches submitted to these men and, technically, to CGM. In essence, this was the salient point over which controversy eventually erupted. In addition to the local pastors at this authority level, there were also certain itinerant ministers whose ministries were recognized, approved, and even "authorized" (they termed it) by the CGM Quintumvirate, who likewise were "submitted" to one of the Five.

Then, under these local pastors in the flow chart of authority and submission came the associate pastors, church-elders, deacons, and lay-leaders (usually called Fellowship or Cell Group Leaders, or something similar) who were "submitted" to these local pastors within the organizational structure of their local ministries and churches, who were in turn "submitted" ultimately to one of the CGM leaders. (In some cases there were also intermediate "middle management" leaders at the local pastor echelon, consisting of some "recognized" older ministers to whom other younger local pastors were "submitted," in order to provide a type of oversight and a supposed mentor-protégé relationship.)

Finally, there were the "sheep" themselves. All of the former comprised the superior class of "Shepherds," while those submitted to their care in their churches were the "sheep." In many cases, this metaphorical moniker attributed to the saints of God was not used in the same affectionate sense as it is used in the Bible and even by Jesus Himself to describe the very special personal and caring relationship between a shepherd and his sheep that typically exists among nomadic sheepherders. Rather, many of the Discipleship/Shepherding adherents came to maintain a very

condescending and demeaned view of believers as “just dumb sheep,” as many came to call them, dumb sheep, whose ability to reason was next to non-existent, which prevented them from knowing what was best for them. Therefore, it was the role of the shepherd, under this widely-held concept concerning “underling” believers, to tell the dumb sheep what to do, where to go, and to basically make their decisions for them, because the sheep were just too stupid to be able to do all this for themselves.

The Multi-Level Structure

One thing that has always struck me as being odd about this whole authority structure proposed by these men as the paradigm for the whole Body of Christ that warrants pointing out is its striking resemblance to certain secular, pyramiding, multi-level sales organizations that have come to be so prominent over the last thirty years or so. It is also quite interesting, whether coincidentally or not, that several of these men as well as some of their submitters have been associated with multi-level marketing organizations. Apparently, this is something which escaped the notice of most observers for years.

Funny thing about these multi-level schemes, usually it is only those at the top of the pyramid who realize significant wealth, primarily off the “blood, sweat, and tears” (not to mention financial resources) of wide-eyed and naive “down-liners” who haven’t yet figured out that it’s basically only the elite few at the top of the pyramid who receive the lion’s-share of the benefit and revenue. Because of this inequitable bent, these kinds of multi-level companies are under the constant scrutiny of State-Attorneys who have the duty to protect the public from fraudulent and unfair business schemes.

Perhaps the multi-level schematic of the CGM leaders would have been a little more plausible had it not been they themselves who just happened to be at the top of the pyramid. As the writer of the article which I have been quoting observed:

> **“They had a national network of followers who formed pyramids of sheep and shepherds. Down through the pyramid went the orders, it was alleged, while up the same pyramid went the tithes.”3**

The overall result of the expanding CGM campaign was that:

> **"…large numbers of charismatic pastors began to be shepherded by the CGM leaders, a development that went uncharted but not unnoticed. It was uncharted because these relationships were personal and not institutional, so there were never any published lists of pastors and congregations being shepherded by CGM leaders…."4**

These comments by the writer hint at one of the aspects of the CGM leaders' operations and agenda that perhaps was the most suspicious and disconcerting, which was that some aspects of same were shrouded in secrecy and concealment. Many meetings of higher echelon leaders were unpublicized and the substance of those meetings by agreement were considered "confidential" by the participants. It seemed that while their was a public aspect of their efforts in which there was a definite, defined, and overt plan to proliferate their teachings and influence at the very minimum nationally if not internationally (and there were numerous international participants as well), there was also a very esoteric aspect of their agenda and operations which was kept in concealment. There has been a sentiment by some ministers over the years that some of this secrecy resulted from a distinct effort by the CGM leaders in collusion with the significant network of pastors and ministers submitted to them to identify and "mark" ministers who opposed the Discipleship doctrines and practices and the CGM agenda, and to in effect "black-ball" them from Charismatic ministry circles, the main purpose of which tactic was individual and collective self-preservation. Secrecy and esotericism should always be viewed with suspicion, for bona fide operations of God are never *"done in a corner"* (Ac. 26:26).

Now, no explanation has ever been given by the Five as to how it was that they knew that God had chosen and appointed them in particular of all the men of God in the world to this unique status as ecclesiastical prefects over the then burgeoning Charismatic Movement, or as to what it was that made them so uniquely qualified for such a post. Nor, was any enlightenment offered as to the reasons for the supposed Divine election of CGM as *the* "umbrella organization" for all other "authorized" Charismatic ministries, as they implied. Rather, these were things that were just to be recognized and accepted by one and all without question. Moreover, due homage and obeisance (plus your tithe, if you were a minister and wanted to be "recognized" and "approved") were also expected. Anyone who did not merely accept all this and docilely fall in line, or who dared to criticize any aspect of it, was branded a rebellious malcontent and dissident.

In light of the revelations which eventually became public knowledge regarding the whole CGM controversy, it is now fairly apparent that the authority and influence which these five men had was (and in the case of the one who continues to maintain his authority over thousands of believers and hundreds of pastors and their churches, Charles Simpson, *is*) presumed and self-assumed, and they all now appear to be usurpers to "thrones" which never really existed except in

their own and their indoctrinated cult-followers' minds. Certainly the stations of authority and ecclesiastical ascendancy these men occupied for a season were never established by God, despite their empirical claims and explanations to the contrary.

All in all, it is now relatively evident that this whole elaborate scheme of the Fab Five was a grandiose, vain-glorious, and humanly-contrived ruse by which they intended, whether with sincere motives or not, to place the entire Charismatic Movement, with its multitudes of new adherents and myriads of ministries and churches under their personal and exclusive dominion and sovereignty. Whether they were naively duped into espousing such an extreme and unrealistic notion, or whether their extensive agenda was motivated by a surrealistic hubris of the highest order, will probably never be known. Nevertheless, what is clear is that this strategy, whether humanly and deliberately contrived, or demonically inspired, amounted to a kind of sophisticated ecclesiastical hegemony, the true end of which could be nothing more than a very unsophisticated and ignoble self-aggrandizement void of any true spiritual essence or virtuous benefit.

Moreover, what is abundantly clear regarding the whole matter is that there was never even the remotest chance that the One, True Sovereign God and True Functional-Head of the Church was ever going to allow these usurpers, or any others, to succeed in any such plan the effect of which is naked subversion of the sovereignty as well as the purposes of God for the true Church in the end-times. Rather, in the end, as He always does when men exceed their callings and purposes, *"exceed(ing) that which is written"* (1 Cor. 4:6), and presumptuously intrude into affairs and create agenda which are beyond the bounds of Divine appointment and human propriety, God Himself, though usually not until sufficient time has elapsed to allow for the exhibition of the utter foolishness of the perpetrators, will eventually intervene and bring such vain and empty attempts to an abrupt halt.

The Pot Boils Over

As the Discipleship/Shepherding tempest swirled, it was not long until a number of other prominent leaders within the Charismatic Movement came forward to announce their opposition to the basic tenets being proliferated by the CGM leaders and their constituency. Finally, in 1975 the Discipleship/Shepherding boiling pot erupted in public controversy, censorship, and outright denunciation.

> **"Pat Robertson (CBN Founder, President) banned the CGM leaders and erased all tapes that included them. Robertson used CBN to pronounce the shepherding teaching "witchcraft" and said the only difference between**

> **the discipleship group and Jonestown was "Kool-Aid." Kathryn Kuhlman refused to appear together with Bob Mumford at the 1975 Conference on the Holy Spirit in Jerusalem. Demos Shakarian and the director of FGBMFI declared the CGM leaders persona non grata. The number of voices swelled as criticism came from Dennis Bennett, Ken Sumrall, Thomas F. Zimmerman (General Superintendent of the Assemblies of God), and David duPlessis. [Parenthesis added by author].**

> **"The heat of the controversy can be captured by reading an open letter, dated June 27, 1975, from Pat Robertson to Bob Mumford. Robertson said that in a recent visit to Louisville, Kentucky, he found cultish language like"submission" rather than churches, "shepherds" not pastors, and "relationships" but not Jesus. Robertson traveled to ORU and found a twenty-year-old "shepherd" who drew tithes from fellow students as part of their submission. Robertson, drawing from Juan Carlos Ortiz's *Call to Discipleship*, charged the leaders with placing personal revelations (rhema) on par with Scripture. He quoted a devotee as saying, "If God Almighty spoke to me, and I knew for a certainty that it was God speaking, and if my shepherd told me to do the opposite, I would obey my shepherd."5**

The litany of known Church leaders publicly denouncing the Prince-Baxter-Mumford-Simpson-Basham consortium was by no means limited to those cited in the article quoted above, but also included a host of others, e.g.: **Kenneth Hagin**, **Kenneth Copeland**, **Jerry Sevelle**, **T.L. Osborn**, **Ken Sumrall**, **John Osteen**, **Judson Cornwall**, **Ralph Mahoney**, **Charles Trombley**, among others. Several books were written to address the error, and a number of ministers disseminated tape series exposing and repudiating the heresy.

Despite attempts by these and other prominent leaders to reason with the CGM leaders and their subscribers, in general, the Five continued to staunchly defend the basic premise of their teaching and to reassert their claim of its Scriptural congruity. Recognizing the adverse effects of the negative publicity and notoriety of the matter, the CGM leaders did, however, put forward what many perceived to be only an appearance of having been mildly chastened and a purported acceptance of some measure of responsibility for reported "excesses" that transpired under their general auspices. However, essentially, the Fab Five fudged on accepting full responsibility by claiming that most of the "errors" were not due to any preceptual imperfection, but rather the result of "excesses" in application committed by overzealous devotees in a few isolated, anomalistic incidences. Despite the public posturing and feeble claims of moderation, the Discipleship leaders and the majority of their devotees were essentially unrepentant and their fundamental practices and beliefs remained virtually unchanged.

The Movement Goes Underground

However, what has transpired over the course of time is that in order to avoid the adverse effects of controversy, the majority of Discipleship proponents and practitioners have gone “underground,” so to speak, employing less overt and less conspicuous methods and means of propagation, cloaking and camouflaging their operations behind more subtle and euphemistic, cryptic language.

For example, the extreme concepts initially referred to as concepts of “pastoring” are now termed “shepherding” principles. To give it a more sophisticated and sanctimonious ring, the obsequious relationship between the subjugated (the sheep) and their subjugator (the shepherd) now is called “covenant relationships.” These “relationships” (if you accept that appellation) in many groups espousing Discipleship/Shepherding/Covenant doctrines and employing variations of the practices advocated under that teaching are actually codified in the form of a “Covenant Agreement” signed by the subjugated in which the subjugated pledges his eternal oath of allegiance and unquestioned obedience and obeisance, along with his financial support, of course, to his “shepherd.” Usually, this “covenant” requirement is a matter which is not addressed openly in the public meetings, but is introduced “in private” to attendees who have been around long enough to have become fully indoctrinated with the group’s ways and teachings, and to have become psychologically dependent on the group (more on this and other psychological mechanisms employed by Discipleship groups later).

Allow me to say in passing that to me, oaths such as these bear little dissimilarity to the secret oaths and pledges required of initiates into secret societies such as the Masons, Elks, or for that matter, Ku Klux Klan and the Mafia, which essentially bind the inductee to that group for life, or in other words, “‘Til death do us part.” In fact, it has been my experience in dealing with hundreds of people in deliverance from demonic powers that the pledge taken by inductees into these secret societies is precisely the same in terms of the spiritual impact it induces as those taken by members of Discipleship/Shepherding/Covenant cults (as we shall discuss later, this is precisely what these groups are cults). A plethora of spirits of bondage, witchcraft, and idolatry saunter right through the door willfully opened by the person who enters into such demonic “covenants” of allegiance to men. Additionally, terribly debilitating and subversive satanic soul-ties are formed with the individuals with whom they have “covenanted.” But, in actuality, the spiritual dynamic that is being instigated in the unseen spiritual realm when a person “covenants” with another human being in this manner, agreeing to subject himself to a mere human rather than unto the Lord Jesus Christ, is a pact of idolatry, because, spiritually speaking, wittingly or unwittingly, the subjectee has in essence pledged to submit his human will to his subjugator. In effect, the subjectee has just become the willing slave of his subjector, for the Spirit says, *“Do you not*

know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, ***you are SLAVES*** *of the one whom you obey"* (Rom. 6:16).

The ultimate result of such a "pax idolatrus" is that that person has in actuality made the pact, not with that leader, but with demons, for in reality there is no such a thing as an idol, but the idolatrous homage rendered unto "idols," whether they be human or inanimate is *"sacrifice to demons, and not to God"* (1 Cor. 10:19-22). In other words, anyone who makes a spiritual covenant with anyone other than God, covenants with demons, whether they intend to or not, for *"You cannot drink the cup of* (fellowship with) *the Lord and the cup of* (fellowship with) *demons; you cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons"* (Ibid, v. 21, parenthesis added by author). If you do so covenant and so partake of fellowship with idols (other gods), or demons, you *"provoke the Lord to jealousy"* (Ibid, v. 22). Thus, in actuality this "covenanting" business and paying homage to human leaders is tantamount to paganistic demon worship. The Bible explicitly constrains us against making such "covenants" with anyone other than the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. It specifically commands, *"Do not become slaves of men"* (1 Cor. 7:23).

Tactical Organizational Restructure

In their effort to go "underground" in the face of growing scrutiny, adverse public sentiment, and controversy, Discipleship proponents, groups, and organizations began a concerted effort toward general obfuscation by means of organizational realignment and restructuring. Some defenders have argued that this development was merely a natural and spontaneous transition rather than a deliberate effort toward obfuscation, and that its proximity to any public disreputation was purely coincidental, however. Whichever is true, what was absolutely clear was that a discernable trend toward reorganization, whatever the reasons may have been, did indeed gradually develop. New affiliations and associations were formed. New sanctioning organizations emerged, as well as "networks" of those organizations, all supposedly offering synergistic benefits to ministers and ministries who affiliated themselves with them.

Essentially, all these reorganization efforts amounted to little more than a smoke-screen and public-posturing, the overall goal of which was to camouflage their largely unchanged goals and purposes of systematic subjugation of individual believers and ultimately a large segment of the collective Body of Christ. Modifications were primarily only cosmetic, aimed at defusing the controversy and rehabilitating the public image. The players were basically the same, and certainly the fundamental teachings and practices were nothing more than only slightly moderated. When the dust settled, the only thing that had changed was not the plan itself but the method of implementation, which was now even more covert and esoteric than before.

The Big Four Networks

Among the more prominent and influential "networks" of charismatic ministers and their ministries which have formed since the eruption of the Discipleship controversy are the **National Leadership Conference** (NLC), the **International Communion of Charismatic Churches** (ICCC), the **Network of Christian Ministries** (NCM), and **Charismatic Bible Ministries** (CBM). None of these require exclusive affiliation, which means that a minister can be affiliated with more than one, and indeed most are. In fact, some of their membership, and especially their top leaders, are, it so happens, members of several of these organizations. Moreover, there is a significant amount of interrelations between these organizations, and some of the more prominent leader/speakers are frequent speakers at conferences sponsored by the different organizations. One of the things all of these ministries share in common is that there is among their memberships significant representation of ministers who essentially are proponents of Discipleship teachings and practices in that they employ some variation of those teachings and practices in their ministries.

The NLC was formed in 1979, largely under the initiative, ironically enough, of one of the staunchest critics of the Discipleship theories, Ken Sumrall of Pensacola, Florida. Yet, clearly the NLC has among its membership today ministers who have been proponents, to varying degrees, of Discipleship beliefs and practices, albeit the original members purported to be opponents.

> **"NLC brought together leaders whose ministries already served networks of charismatic assemblies, in particular Sumrall of Liberty Church, Pensacola, Florida (now with some 350 to 400 local churches); Gerald Derstine of Bradenton, Florida (who followed Sumrall as president); Bill Ligon of Brunswick, Georgia; Russ Williamson of Hopewell Junction, New York; Ernest Gruen of Kansas City; Bob Heil of Hillsboro, Missouri, and Bob Wright of Davidsonville, Maryland. The director of the NLC is Jim Jackson, of Montreat, North Carolina….NLC is clear that it is not a new denomination, but a fellowship of charismatic leaders with *common convictions and a similarity of vision.* NLC churches are often named "Community Church" or "Covenant Church"…."6**

One of these "networks" which has come to be relatively expansive and influential behind the scenes of Charismatic Christendom is the International Communion of Charismatic Churches (ICCC), "led in the United States by Bishops **John Mears** {sic} of Evangel Temple, Washington, D.C., and **Earl Paulk** of Chapel Hill Harvester Church, Decatur, Georgia."7 A development arising out of this conglomeration of ministries was the establishment of an elite and exclusive echelon of leaders at the apex of their hierarchy, a clerical clique called the College of Bishops, composed of a scant few men who apparently decided somewhere along the way, after the manner of the Nicolaitans

in the first century of the Church (more on this in a subsequent chapter), that they were of sufficient superiority over their fellows to merit the ecclesiastical status of “Bishops.” After thus honoring and installing themselves, the founders over time have hand-selected and inducted into their imperial and exalted ranks certain other individuals with expansive ecclesiastical kingdoms composed of large numbers of subjects, which made them worthy of such a status of ascendancy and preeminence over everyone else of lesser status.

The CBM was founded in 1986 by **Oral Roberts**, and as of 1988 had a membership in excess of 1,200. Of the three organizations mentioned, the CBM is the loosest and least directive in nature. Yet, its membership is likewise largely constituted, especially at the highest levels, by ministers who are also members and top-echelon leaders of some of these other organizations, ostensibly, seeking fellowship with charismatic leaders of “common convictions and a similarity of vision,”8 which convictions and vision apparently include some form of Discipleship beliefs and practices.

To me, the most enigmatic of all these “networks” is the Network of Christian Ministries (NCM), founded by **Charles Green** of New Orleans, Louisiana. According to biographical information published by one of NCM’s members, Dr. **Bill Hamon** (President, Christian International-Network of Prophetic Ministries), the NCM was birthed and established to promote the networking of certain individual ministers and ministries who “are willing to co-labor together” in endeavors of mutual interest. I say the NCM is to me the most enigmatic of all these “networks” because of the paradoxical membership mixture, which besides the founder includes on the one hand Bob Mumford and Charles Simpson, two of the original Fab Five founders of the Discipleship heresy, along with others such as Earl Paulk (Chapel Hill Harvester Church), **Larry Tomczak** (People of Destiny International), and **Bob Weiner** (Maranatha Ministries) whose ministries incorporated their own variations of the Discipleship teachings and practices, and on the other hand men such as Kenneth Copeland, Ken Sumrall, and the now late Demos Shakarian, all of whom were staunch opponents of the whole Discipleship matter. Other NCM members (as of 1989) include: Oral Roberts, **Jack Hayford**, Bill Hamon, **John Gimenez**, **Dick Iverson**, **Houston Miles**, **Carl Richardson**, **Larry Lea**, **Paul Paino**, and **Dick Benjamin**.

Aside from being a member of the NCM, as mentioned, Charles Simpson, following the CGM debacle, founded in 1987 the Fellowship of Covenant Ministers and Conferences (FCMC), based in Mobile, Alabama. “FCMC, with approximately 350 members, represents the sector of the discipling-shepherding ministry of CGM that survived the final dissolution of the old CGM team in 1985.”9 Without question, FCMC member churches are the most overt and ardent subscribers to and practitioners of the Discipleship teachings and practices. Though “Covenant Churches” now claim to have moderated their teachings and practices to some degree, they continue to adhere to the basic principles of the original

doctrines. “The FCMC theology of covenant is similar to that of NLC, except that a functional commitment (not regarded as a covenant) is made between the pastoring pastor and the pastored pastor.”10

Like the NLC churches, most FCMC churches have the term “Covenant” in their names. FCMC churches make little bones about espousing Discipleship doctrines and employing Discipleship practices, and often defend same with an overt stridency, unapproachability, and pugnacity. Though Simpson and the FCMC deny being a denomination, the organization with 350 church-members has nonetheless become a protodenomination of significant and on-going influence within Christendom.

The Fab Five Today

Now since I have elaborated in the detail I have on the past history and development of the Discipleship/Shepherding saga, I think it only fair to also report the developments that have transpired with the movement as well as the original CGM leaders since the debacle began, and offer some commentary on the significance of those developments.

Christian Growth Ministries, per se, no longer exists. In 1986 what remainded of the CGM group, disbanded, and Mumford, Prince, Basham, and Baxter released everyone who were submitted to them in “covenant relationships.”

Derek Prince (1915-2003) was the first to leave the group and to publicly repudiate, to some degree, the teachings he had helped to formulate and proliferate, in particular the assertions regarding the requisite of every believer, including ministers, to have a “personal pastor.”

At the age of 80, in March of 1996, Prince redeemed himself from his involvement in the Shepherding error and its proliferation with a series of talks to his ministry staff that were later compiled into a book, Protection From Deception. His remarks were reflective of sincere repentance, regret, and chagrin, but also rich with invaluable insight concerning the denouement of spiritual deception as well as avoidance and protection from it. He addressed five movements emerging post-WWII in which he had some personal involvement—**Latter Rain**, **Manifested Sons of God**, **Children of God**, **William Branham**, and the **Discipleship/Shepherding Movement**—enumerating his estimation regarding the common root causes of these movements’ derailment. Among the causes he cites are: earthly desires (worldliness); unrenewed (traditional) mindsets; pride; personal (selfish) ambition; “soulishness” in ministerial functioning; and, a mixture of spirits. He concluded that these carnal imperfections opened the door for incursion of the demonic into all of

these movements, which engendered confusion, which produced division, which led ultimately to discrediting of the genuine work of the Holy Spirit.

In another book published just prior to his death, Prince proffered poignant reproof regarding fallacious doctrines regarding "covenant relationships" as well.

Prince continued his international ministry and to be highly esteemed by many charismatics and Neo-Pentecostals until he succumbed to numerous health problems on September 24, 2003, at the age of 88, in his hometown of Jerusalem.

Don Basham moved to Cleveland, Ohio, essentially disenfranchised from public ministry, and subsequently passed away of cancer and other medical problems in March of 1989.

Ern Baxter eventually quasi-retired from public ministry, and relocated to San Diego, California, where he died of leukemia at the age of 79 on July 9, 1993, approximately one year after I began writing this book. **(Important: See Footnote 12)**

Bob Mumford relocated to California, where he lived for several years while he attempted to get his ministry back on track, apparently meeting with only moderate success. He later moved to North Carolina and teamed up with Jim Jackson in a "Christian" community development project. To his credit, Mumford, along with Prince, has been forthright in his attempt to make amends for past mistakes. In an article published in *Charisma* magazine in August, 1987, he offered a rather vague and hedging "apology," a feeble and apparently ineffective attempt to reconcile the wrongs that had been committed during the Discipleship Movement. He seemed at the time to still be somewhat reticent about admitting to error and accepting blame for the spiritual atrocities incurred, and was certainly mistaken, as it turned out, if he had surmised that a cursory "statement of regret" would suffice to appease the anger and resentment that he had engendered against himself over the years as one of the primary principals of the Discipleship heresy.

Then in a subsequent *Charisma & Christian Life* article published in February, 1990, reportedly after having sought the advice and counsel of Jack Hayford and others, according to the article, Mumford spoke more as one who was genuinely chastened, repentant, and willing to deal with the issue in a more direct fashion, accepting full responsibility for his error. According to the article, Mumford read a statement in November of 1989 "to a gathering of pastors at the Christian Believers United meeting in Ridgecrest, North Carolina,"11 in which he said:

> **"I repent. I was wrong. I ask for forgiveness," Mumford said about his involvement in the discipleship movement.**

The article went on to say:

> **…Mumford decided that he needed to publicly 'repent' of his responsibility in setting up a system where so many people were hurt by misuses of authority. "Some families were split up and lives turned upside down," says Mumford. "Some of these families are still not back together."**

In his statement, Mumford admitted that he had not heeded earlier warnings about **doctrinal error** from Hayford and two others. "While it was not my intent to be willful," he said, "I ignored their input to my own hurt and the injury of others." …He admitted that there had been an **"unhealthy submission resulting in perverse and unbiblical obedience to human leaders."** He took personal responsibility for these abuses, saying that many of them happened under his sphere of leadership.

Thus, the upshot of the whole Discipleship/Shepherding controversy after some twenty (now 40, in 2015) years since its inception is that at least three and possibly four of the five12 original proponents of the Discipleship "movement" have to varying degrees admitted the doctrines were flawed, erroneous, and wrong. These public recantations should, one would think, speak loudly and clearly to all those who continue to espouse these doctrines and in any way participate in the practices they engender, but incredibly, that has not been the case.

At present, of the original Fab Five, apparently only Simpson continues to stubbornly refuse to renounce and repent from the heretical Discipleship principles and practices. Simpson's admitted intransigence and explicit refusal to acknowledge the erroneousness of Discipleship teaching is reflected in the aforementioned *Charisma & Christian Life* article reporting Mumford's recantation:

> **Charles Simpson told *Charisma* that he supports Mumford's statement as it stands in that it comes from Mumford. But he warns against too much analysis and against dismissing discipleship principles as a result of this. Ern Baxter declined to comment about Mumford's statement.**
>
> **Simpson said *"individual actions"* did need to be righted. "I have done things that I repent of and I do want forgiveness and I do want to see restoration," he said. "I say with Moses, who in Numbers 11 said, 'Lord, let me not see my wretchedness.' I think I have seen some of mine."**

> **"My problem is not repenting; my problem is to continue leading…."**
>
> **Simpson said he still believes in and teaches covenant relationships. "That's the only qualification," he said. "I put no qualifications on the fact that I did things wrong. But I CANNOT RENOUNCE all of the [covenant] relationships I have. I CANNOT DO THAT as a matter of CONSCIENCE."13**

"Covenant Relationships" With Demons

The last two sentences of the Simpson quip succinctly captures the essence of the overriding problem with the Discipleship teachings, which is religious captivation. I fully believe Simpson when he states categorically, **"But I CANNOT RENOUNCE all of the [covenant] relationships I have. I CANNOT DO THAT as a matter of CONSCIENCE."** I believe he spoke the absolute truth here—he literally **CANNOT** renounce those covenant relationships because the demonic spirits behind them, to which he has subjected himself over many years, have him bound. In fact, I believe (and it pains me deeply to say this) those words were in actuality the words of those demons uttered through the lips of Mr. Simpson.

Typically, when a person becomes indoctrinated by these doctrines of demons, it is as though it has been seared into his or her conscience as with a branding iron (1 Tim. 4:2), and that person has become psychologically enslaved by the demons behind the religious lie. So much so that it becomes virtually impossible, except through the supernatural intervention of God, for that person to renounce the teaching and the idolatrous covenants he has made. Yet, renunciation of those unBiblical teachings and practices, as well as idolatrous covenantal relationships, is the primary requirement for emancipation from the demonic captivation they engender. (This matter of covenants with demons, however, will be discussed in greater depth later in this book.)

Extending a hand of deliverance and recovery to victims of *Charismatic captivation* resulting from erroneous doctrines and practices is the sole motivation for the writing of this book. And, that hand is extended to every victim of this demonic perpetration, which, I believe includes Mr. Simpson and the other surviving original propagators of the Discipleship doctrines and practices, those who remain proponents and participants, as well as those who were unwittingly captivated in the throes of deception. Debunking and disproving these heretical doctrines is only a necessary precursor to this overriding objective of ministering to those who need ministry.

People are not the problem. Nor are they the adversary, the devil is (1 Pet. 5:8). Without equivocation or qualm, this book is a spiritual counteroffensive, launched against the satanic powers that have been surreptitiously laboring virtually unimpeded and unknown for years within the Church through the propagation of this doctrine of demons. Every weapon of spiritual warfare is deployed herewith, and precisely trained to score a direct hit against these demonic powers, in order to expose and totally annihilate them. That is the sole objective and mission. In no way, is anything in this volume an attack on any person. That would serve no useful purpose.

Most of what God does, He does through willing members of His Body. Jesus is the Head, but we are His Body. The supernatural intervention of God unto those needing His outstretched hand of ministry, of which I have spoken, will likely be manifest only through someone with the fortitude and willingness to be used by the Lord, whatever the personal cost. Thus, having circumspectly counted the cost, selected five smooth stones from the brook of the Spirit, and looked the adversary dead in the eye, I echo the words of David unto the Philistine champion, Goliath:

> ***You come to me with a sword, a spear, and a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have taunted. This day the Lord will deliver you up into my hands and I will strike you down and remove your HEAD from you. And I will give the dead bodies of the army of the Philistines this day to the birds of the sky and the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, and that all this assembly may know that the Lord does not deliver by sword or by spear; for the battle is the Lord's and He will give you into our hands."*** **(1 Sam. 17:45-47)**

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Endnotes:

1 H.D. Hunter, "Shepherding Movement," DICTIONARY OF PENTECOSTAL AND CHARISMATIC MOVEMENTS, p. 784, Zondervan [parenthetical explanation added by author].

2 P.D. Hocken, "Charismatic Movement," DICTIONARY OF PENTECOSTAL AND CHARISMATIC MOVEMENTS, p. 137, Zondervan.

3 H.D. Hunter, loc. cit.

4 P.D. Hocken, loc. cit.

5 H.D. Hunter, loc. cit.

6 P.D. Hocken, op cit., p. 141, [Emphasis added by the author].

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.

11 “Mumford Repents of Discipleship Errors,” Charisma & Christian Life, pp. 15,16, February, 1990, Strang Communications, Inc.

12 Ern Baxter, though, to the author’s knowledge, he never publicly repudiated or renounced the Discipleship doctrines and practices, however did disassociate himself from CGM leaders and related involvement a few years prior to his death. [First Revised Edition Addendum:] Interestingly, a short time after the original version of this volume was released, I was contacted by a close friend and associate of Ern Baxter’s for more than 35 years, who said he wanted me to know that he had been with Ern when (in his words) “he took his last breath,” and what I wrote in the original footnote was indeed the truth — despite the repeated pleadings of many of his closest friends and associates over many years, Ern never did repudiate or renounce the Shepherding teachings. Perhaps of further import is the fact that Charles Simpson, who considered Baxter to be his chief mentor and spiritual father, purchased Baxter’s extensive personal library from Baxter’s widow, which is now housed in a library operated under the auspices of Simpson’s ministry. It would seem fairly obvious that the spiritual effects of the “covenant relationship” between Baxter and Simpson is the source of Simpson’s inability to renounce and repudiate the hyper-authoritarian teachings and practices of the movement they, along with the other three of the “Fab Five,” spearheaded.

13 “Mumford Repents of Discipleship Errors,” Op. cit., p. 16 [emphasis added by author].